
Working with Native American Communities: A Practical Guide to Connecting with Tribal Populations

A presentation before the Southwest
Community Impact Assessment Conference

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Native American

n.

- A member of any of the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.
 - Any member of the peoples living in North or South America before the Europeans arrived.
 - *adj.* of or pertaining to American Indians or their culture or languages
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The numbers game

- The American Southwest has the largest concentration of Native Americans in the U.S.
 - Approx. 900,000 tribal members reside in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Nevada and California (combined)
 - This accounts for more than one-third the population of American Indians in the U.S.
 - Approx. 185 different federally-recognized tribes call the Southwest home
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The numbers game

- Arizona has the third largest population of Native Americans
 - Approx. $\frac{1}{4}$ million tribal members live in Arizona
 - Equals approx. 5% of the total state population
- Up to 28% of Arizona's land base are reservation lands
- 22 distinct federally-recognized tribes call Arizona home

History isn't a thing of the past

- History is contemporary
 - Things that happened in the yesteryears are very real and vital today
 - Accountable for promises made by predecessors
 - Distrust for government
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Overcoming the barriers

- Establishing trust and rapport is the key to success
 - Hands-on approach
 - Face-to-face interaction
 - Be cognizant
 - Listen and understand
 - Don't sell or make hollow promises
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Understanding the communication process

- Holistic decision-making
- Egalitarianism
- Reaching consensus

Keep in mind

- Suspicion of outsiders
 - ❑ Overcome the big city mentality
 - ❑ Earn trust
 - ❑ Dress casually
 - ❑ Shop locally
 - Cultural practices
 - ❑ Time urgency
 - ❑ Interpretation
 - ❑ Photography
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Keep in mind

- The “wild west” mentality
 - Irreverent humor
 - Tribal governments as sovereign
 - Same respect as other elected officials
 - Multiple layers of government function
 - More comfortable with federal than state, counties or municipalities
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Keep in mind

■ Media

- ❑ Radio is huge
 - ❑ Newspapers work, but most are weeklies
 - ❑ Local TV is almost non-existent
 - ❑ Community centers
 - ❑ Fliers are key
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